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TO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001507

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [IR](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: PM SINIORA, WITH EDELMAN, THANKS USG FOR
SECURITY ASSISTANCE

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) Under Secretary for Defense Eric Edelman met with Prime Minister Siniora on October 17 to explain to the Prime Minister that USG support for the Lebanese Armed Forces had been formally institutionalized with the recent establishment of the Joint Military Commission (JMC). U/S Edelman also asked the Prime Minister to express Lebanon's support to Iraqi Prime Minister Malaki for the U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) recently negotiated with Iraq. Siniora was non-committal.

2. (C) Siniora thanked U/S Edelman for the USG support for Lebanon's army and said that it would restore confidence in the Lebanese state and help Lebanon approach bilateral negotiations with Syria as an equal partner. Siniora then called for progress on the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and a resolution of the Ghajar and Shebaa Farms disputes with Israel, topics he frequently raises with senior USG visitors.
End Summary.

USG Support for Lebanon Will Remain Constant

3. (C) U/S Edelman began the meeting by informing the Prime Minister that he had just signed a Letter of Agreement with the Lebanese Armed Forces to provide 40 mm automatic grenade launchers. U/S Edelman said he had also traveled to Lebanon to follow up on the October 6 discussions of the Joint Military Commission. He said that there would be continued support for the Lebanese security services after the upcoming change in U.S. administration, noting that there "is broad support for an independent, sovereign Lebanon in Washington." Edelman said that his colleague, Major General Allardice, CENTCOM J-5, had visited Lebanon six times since May 2008 and that General Petraeus the incoming CENTCOM Commander, had expressed a strong interest in continuing cooperative efforts with the LAF.

4. (C) Prime Minister Siniora thanked U/S Edelman for his efforts to support that LAF. He said support for the

Lebanese security services was even more critical at this time, when there is increasing doubt and skepticism about the state's ability to prevail against its adversaries. "We have 'held the fort' against all odds and we are determined to continue doing so," he declared.

15. (C) Siniora said that he is also interested in rebuilding the LAF's ability to think strategically. "They took orders from Syria for so long, they've forgotten to think about how best to serve the interests of their own country." U/S Edelman responded that the USG had allocated USD 4 million for International Military Education and Training (IMET)) a significant amount given the size of Lebanon. He added that he and his colleagues had been impressed by the planning and preparation of the LAF leadership during the recent JMC.

Edelman Requests Siniora's Support
for U.S./Iraqi SOFA Agreement

16. (C) Thanking the Prime Minister for his recent and productive visit to Iraq, U/S Edelman asked Siniora for Lebanon's support for the recently negotiated bilateral SOFA agreement between the U.S. and Iraq, which is intended to govern military cooperation after December 31, 2008. Edelman said that Siniora's support for this agreement will demonstrate to Prime Minister Malaki that there is regional support this agreement and that a SOFA with the U.S. will not be viewed as diminishing Iraq sovereignty.

17. (C) Siniora did not respond directly to the request to

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support the SOFA. He said that Saddam Hussein had indeed been viewed as a menace. "We all wanted to be rid of him. But what followed has proved to be even worse. It has paved the way for increased radicalism from Iran."

18. (C) Siniora believes that Iraq can play a central role in the region. For centuries, according to the PM, Iraq served as a buffer between the two great empires in Turkey and Iran. "Without Iraq, you are now seeing the influence of Iran on the shores of the Mediterranean with Hizballah." Siniora said that he plans to return to Iraq soon for additional meetings. "The Arab world turned its back on Iraq for a few years and that was a mistake. We need Iraq back as much as they need us." U/S Edelman agreed that it was important to contain Iranian influence. "This is why we support Lebanon; a successful Lebanon will be the first step."

19. (C) U/S Edelman added that much progress had been made on the ground in Iraq and that a period of hope has begun. He agreed that radicalization was an enormous problem in the region, but also suggested that the cure must come from the region itself.

The Thorns in Lebanon's Side

110. (C) Siniora then turned to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, which he described as the single greatest concern of Muslims worldwide. "If no solution is found, nothing else can be achieved or won. Terrorism is a disease and force alone is not a medicine that can cure it." Siniora said there is an increased feeling of helplessness, repression and humiliation and he urged USG officials to consider the underlying causes.

111. (C) Turning to Syria, Siniora said the Lebanese genuinely wish for good relations with their neighbor, given the shared geography and history of the two people. "But we will not be taken for granted or allow ourselves to be treated as a little brother. We will not be a clone of the Syrian model."

112. (C) As for bilateral relations with Israel, Siniora said

there were a number of "outstanding issues" that have not been resolved during his tenure as Prime Minister. He acknowledged that the resolution of the detainee issue (i.e., the Samir Kuntar matter) had been controversial, but said the U.S. should ask its Israeli allies why they had arranged the prisoner swap in a way which discredited the Lebanese state.

¶13. (C) Siniora continues to be frustrated by the Ghajar issue. "There has been no progress in two years. It costs Israel more to keep up the security patrols than it would for them to just resettle a few hundred Israelis) most of whom are smuggling narcotics." Turning to Shebaa Farms, Siniora said he noted a lack of international will to find a solution to this problem and he accused the U.S. and Israel of playing into Hizballah's hands by allowing this continued occupation of Lebanese territory. "This works for Hizballah) Syria and Iran do not want a solution either. Hizballah is now the hero of the story." It is time for the U.S. to look analytically at the problem and reach the proper conclusions, said Siniora. U/S Edelman responded that the PM's messages had been heard at high levels in Washington and that the Secretary of State was working with the Israeli leadership and UN SYG Ban Ki Moon on this subject.

Meeting Participants

¶14. (U) - Ambassador Michele Sison
- Eric S. Edelman,
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
- Christopher Straub,
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
for the Middle East

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- Major General Robert Allardice,
CENTCOM J-5
- Colonel Patricia Warren,
Military Assistant to the Under Secretary
- Melissa Dalton,
OSD Lebanon Desk Officer
- Lieutenant Colonel David Alley,
Defense and Army Attache, U.S. Embassy Beirut
- Jacqueline Ward,
Special Assistant to the Ambassador,
U.S. Embassy Beirut

- Prime Minister Fouad Siniora
- Rola Nouredine,
Special Advisor to the Prime Minister
- Major General Eid,
Military Advisor to the Prime Minister

¶15. (U) U/S Edelman has cleared this cable.

SISON